



## The Game

By Barry Janoff

### ESPN Zone, Philips Eye HDTVs; Cadillac, Reebok at Super Party

**E**SPN, which prides itself on bringing TV viewers as close to sports action as they can get without a field pass, is pumping up the visuals at its ESPN Zone restaurants by converting screens to HDTVs.

A multimillion-dollar project with Philips Consumer Products will see the rollout of as many as 80 HDTVs per location nationwide by year's end, with New York, Las Vegas, Baltimore and Washington converted to HD in time for Super Bowl XL on Feb. 5 (on Disney-owned sister company ABC). The remaining ESPN Zone locations in Chicago, Anaheim, Atlanta and Denver will roll out thereafter (a ninth location is being planned for Los Angeles in 2009). In each location, the main HDTV viewing areas are being rebranded from the Studio Grill to Philips HD Room. Some of the screens will project images as large as 16 feet.

Disney Regional Entertainment, which is overseeing the conversion, will support with e-mail blasts to "a robust ESPN Zone loyalty club membership" and a TV spot, via The BallPark, Los Angeles, that features HDTVs in a commercial breaking nationally in mid-February, according to John Pierce, director of marketing, creative content and communications at Disney Regional Entertainment, Burbank, Calif. In the spot, a businesswoman on the road is worried about her husband and kids back home, so she calls him on his cell. The kids are supposed to be studying, so Dad doesn't let on that they're at an ESPN Zone watching HDTVs and enjoying other amenities. But he gets busted when they walk through a live TV show emanating from the restaurant and Mom, who is watching ESPN, sees them.

"We've been converting from JVC to Philips TVs for about two years, and we've had a Philips big-screen HDTV in each location, but the time is right to ramp up the conversion [to HDTVs]," said Pierce. "The price has come

down, our infrastructures can handle the technology where they couldn't two years ago and there are many more shows and networks, including ESPNHD and ESPN2HD, that now broadcast in HD. When you see one, that's impressive. But when you have 50 or 60, that's almost better than being at a game."



See me: Maxim poster (top); New York ESPN Zone HDTVs.

#### Party to the Maxim

CADILLAC, ABSOLUT, Reebok and Coors Light will be among the marketers with over-the-top presence at the sixth annual Super Bowl party being hosted by men's lifestyle magazine Maxim, being held in Detroit on Feb. 4. The theme this year—at a secret location disclosed only to the 1,800 or so invitees—will be a rock opera à la The Who's Tommy. Marketers utilizing the event as a platform to generate buzz for new products and conduct ongoing branding efforts include Cadillac, which will feature the 2007 Escalade and XLR; Absolut, which will unveil a new flavored vodka; Reebok, which will promote a new line of sports shoes and the latest efforts in its "I Am" campaign; Coors Light and The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa.

**EXTRA INNINGS:** Among the unusual items that will be seen during ESPN's 10th annual Winter X Games, Jan. 28-31 in Aspen, Colo., will be miniflags and other "stickables" from Swicherz, Santa Monica, Calif. ESPN purchased some 2,000 of the flags (about \$4,000 worth), which read "Winter X Games Ten, Aspen." They can be stuck via adhesive bases onto snowboards, skis and helmets and stay in place "through almost any condition," said Swicherz CEO Tom Viscount. "ESPN was really stoked about them," he said. "We can personalize the message, so we're trying to get SoBe, Mountain Dew, Taco Bell and others interested." Swicherz miniproducts range from stickable skulls and devil heads to figures from *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*.  
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